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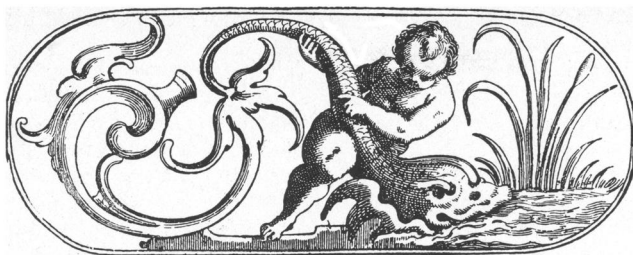
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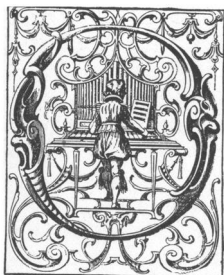
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PROBLEMS OF MUSEUM INSTRUCTION



YES, I see now, a hermit and two fawns! But why should an artist conceal his ideas? Why doesn't he say clearly what he means? I have seen this picture twice before and never discovered either the hermit or

the fawns. I wish you would explain the meaning of modern art."

These comments before a picture in the Museum brought vividly to my mind a little group of art students who visited the Museum years ago, asking and seeking to answer similar questions. In turn each would play the part of a visitor determined to penetrate the secrets of art. Whatever the starting-point, the aim was to bring the discussion back to purely aesthetic grounds. But the questioner was adroit and conversion came hard; part of the exhilaration of the game was to see how long each could conscientiously resist the contagious enthusiasm of our guide, philosopher, and friend.

The ardor of those days comes back to me now and again in the more formal museum interview. In certain cases formal is hardly the word, community of interest so soon breaks down the barriers; and although this happens seldom, these are the hours that one remembers gratefully. A sculptor comes to visit the classical collection. For him the antique marbles are all lessons in transcription; it is not enough to connect them with the past,

their relation to the types of today is quite as pertinent. One knows all this, but it is well to be reminded and inspiring to go over the material with some one whose eye is so keen. Another visitor has a wide knowledge of mediaeval thought and Christian symbolism. Time is limited and the object of guidance is to "strike the trail" without wasting energy on non-essentials; it is of equal importance to trace examples widely scattered through the Museum galleries. The request for "the primitives in the Altman Collection" generally comes from a student of art history. By good fortune, it may be the first time the visitor has seen these pictures, and innumerable questions come up for discussion, questions of technique, problems of authorship and date. The instructor who is familiar with the resources of the Museum is in requisition in all these instances as guide rather than as teacher.

It is only when individuals or groups of persons arrange in advance for a series of appointments that museum instruction can be called organized in any sense. "I should like a course in archaeology. Will you give it to me?" is a typical request, which may become disconcerting if followed by the suggestion, "I have an hour this morning—we might begin at once." Archaeology is a large word, but the instruction is equally satisfactory given under a simpler title. The class room is at hand with books and photographs to supplement the Museum objects. The value of such courses depends in great measure upon the quality of interest, but fortunately we all believe that the objects themselves have power to educate; one need not be discouraged by the remark, "We like coming to the Museum but we don't want to

have to think"; for it is more than likely that before the hour is over these very visitors will have done considerable thinking.

A variety of motives leads to Museum courses. "We have seen these things and we want to know something about them," is the most frequent introduction, and a week or two later, "We must go back and see them all again." It is a satisfaction when people come just because they enjoy the Museum. "This is the one hour in the week that we look forward to." Naturally the Instructor looks forward to it as well. A student of music or the drama wishes to study the principles of design in the figurative arts. A series of visits may be arranged for a class in the history of art from a private school. A real zest is given to the study in the presence of originals. It is gratifying to recognize Angelico when the label is covered and a triumph to defend your position against opponents. Distinctions between idealists and naturalists no longer appear theoretical in the Altman room. The martyrdom of St. Sebastian acquires a grim interest before the case of crossbows.

The armor collection seems specially designed for the young history student. The battle of Crécy is reanimate—perhaps this very suit of armor saw that field of battle, let us look for the English longbows that put the knights to flight. Joan of Arc and Diana of Poitiers are called back from a shadowy page of history to life-and-blood existence by helmet and spurs. The tournament may be followed from *Ivanhoe's* day on to the fateful contest in which Henry the Second lost his sight and his life. See the graven armor which he did not live to receive from its maker! Nor are the saints excluded. He who wrought with such cunning the hammered plates of steel was championed by St. Eloi, a smith undaunted, who had shod a fiery war-horse by removing each hoof in turn and returning them one by one to the astonished beast, neatly shod!

The Museum visitors of whom we have so far spoken fall into certain groups: the small group that are like tinder to the spark, the larger group that have some

definite purpose and reserve regularly some time for Museum study. There remain the casual visitors who from the most varied motives ask for the Instructor's help. Among these, many come with a definite request, for example, "I am interested in medicine and burial, I should like to know about medicine and burial in Egypt." This subject proved so engrossing that we met again the following day. "I am preparing for an examination on furniture; will you review with me the typical examples in the Museum collection?" "What material have you here which will help me to judge the architect's plan for a font which I am giving to a church in Brooklyn? Can you suggest scenes which would be appropriate for the decoration?"

There are other visitors, however, who leave the responsibility to the Instructor. "We are all business men. This gentleman is a printer, and I am a manufacturer—we leave it to you what we shall see." It is easy to follow a lead, but what request is more difficult than to be shown the "most interesting things in the Museum." Here, if ever, a divining rod is necessary. Who is to predict that the gentleman who wanders listlessly by his wife's side through gallery after gallery is suddenly to awaken before an illuminated page and follow eagerly with professional knowledge the development of printing?

It might have been expected that the lady who desired, during a three days' visit in New York, a "course in ancient art" would have had enough after "one half hour of research work" in Greek sculpture, but no one would have been prepared for the emotion with which she begged, "Take me to something I like!" She was right, however. She was trying to return to a field, however narrow, in which she had experienced enjoyment.

"Conservation, education, inspiration"—these have been designated as the purposes of a Museum. Its existence is dependent upon the first. Its efficacy is measured by the last. Our concern is with the second, with an education "which shall largely increase one's capacity for enjoyment."

E. R. A.